

COMPLETE  
7-DAY GUIDE TO  
BBCtv and Radio  
**BBCtv**  
**NEW SEASON**  
Get the Picture! 60 TVs to be won this month — page 5

# Radio Times



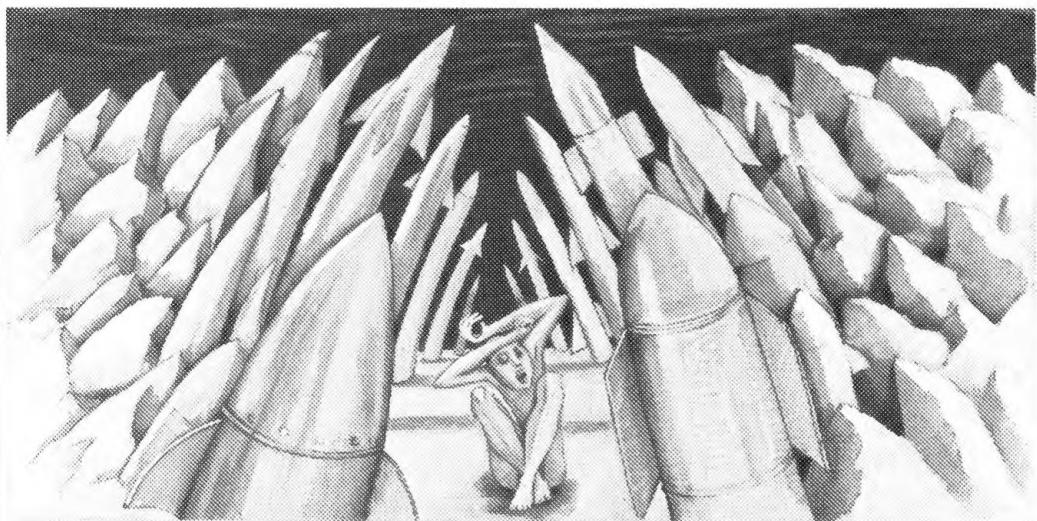
## Picking up the threads

BBC2 screens two visions of life after the bomb: 'Threads', a drama-documentary, examines the effects of a nuclear attack on Sheffield, while 'On the Eighth Day' predicts a freezing twilight world. The programmes are followed by a 'Newsnight Nuclear Debate'



**The Newsnight Nuclear Debate**  
**Monday BBC2**

*How well established is the 'nuclear winter' theory? How safe is deterrence? Two major programmes on BBC2 this week are likely to spark off a controversial discussion in Monday's Newsnight Nuclear Debate. Presenter John Tusa asks ...*



## **Could it really happen?**

SUNDAY NIGHT'S drama-documentary *Threads* assumes an all-out nuclear exchange between East and West of 3,000 megatons. Britain's share – if that is the right word – would be 210 megatons.

The argument that nuclear weapons, horrific as they are, can be used in a limited way assumes that the first weapon, at least, is fired at an obviously tactical target, fired with limited military purpose and a specific political purpose in mind. Thus, faced with an overwhelming Warsaw Pact conventional attack in Western Europe, NATO might fire a single nuclear weapon at a Warsaw pact concentration of armour.

The Warsaw Pact's response would – though they deny nuclear weapons could be used in such a way – in practice also be as much a political explosion as a military one. It would be large enough to show that their will, too, was not to be cowed, and directed at an appropriately higher military target. If neither side literally got the message, then uncontrollable escalation would in due course occur.

More likely – in this view – the sheer trauma of the first military nuclear explosions in 40 years would galvanise the world's political system into action to head off the ultimate horror of the nuclear winter. But such a scheme of events assumes time between exchanges, clear communications and rational calculation on both sides.

The criticism of such a scenario is that it is unrealistic and based on false assumptions. Communications will not be good; they will have been partially or totally destroyed by the very first

nuclear air burst, fired for precisely that purpose. The mood will not be calm and rational but intensely irrational; it will not be the time for calculation but for demonstration of power and the attempt to gain a psychological advantage. In such circumstances, a slight appearance of being mad may awe the opponent far more effectively than a gentlemanly game of nuclear chess.

For if both sides behave as if they have a common interest in crisis management then they will never have reached the nuclear brink in the first place. It is far more likely that, having done so, the side on the receiving end of the first nuclear weapon will not stop to ask if it is a single shot or the first of a series; if it is really only an isolated attack or a weapon with a political tip to its warhead. Instead it will act on the assumption that with the nuclear threshold crossed, the side that's quickest on the draw stands the greater chance of success.

But what is success in a nuclear winter? One nuclear weapon means all nuclear weapons; such is the realistic, or pessimistic, argument.

And where does deterrence stand in such an out-turn of events? Some would say that, with the new understanding of the longer-term effects of a massive nuclear exchange, even the contemplated use of nuclear weapons as instruments of defence becomes a ludicrous contradiction in terms. Others will argue that deterrence already existed in the concept of MAD – Mutual Assured Destruction. The nuclear winter adds a grisly extra dimension to what we already knew. ●

*Sunday's drama-documentary tries to imagine the unthinkable - the aftermath of a nuclear attack on Sheffield.*  
**Jim Crace reports**

# Acting Armageddon

UNFORTUNATELY it is a fine day on Curbar Edge in the Peak District national park. Almost too fine for filming *Threads*. A dark day with an even blanket of low cloud would have been best. The camera crew have fitted filters to cut out the sharp sunlight and 'props' have spread stage snow thinly over rocks and heather.

They are filming the icy nuclear night of PH1 (the first year of Post Holocaust Britain). Russia and the Western powers have stumbled into war over a crisis of control in Iran. Britain is devastated by 200 megatons of nuclear explosive - that's 10,000 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb. Two Soviet warheads have exploded within 20 miles of Curbar: one on Finningley Airfield and another over Sheffield.

'No smiling faces, please,' requests producer and director Mick Jackson as several from his coach-loads of 'volunteers', plus professional extras, cheerfully turn their faces towards the sun, or look contentedly across the Derwent valley towards Chatsworth Park and the 'plague village' of Eyam.

'Remember. You are all refugees from the city of Sheffield, six weeks after the bomb. This is the peak for radiation sickness for those who haven't been killed outright. I want some of you to stumble - and some of you actually to keel over and give up. It's like Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. You're cold. The temperature is



Bomb shock:  
two survivors  
crouch in fear  
in their cellar  
as looters ransack  
their property, while

(below) two  
dazed house-  
holders search  
desperately for  
their missing son  
among the wreckage

below freezing. Some of you will collapse from a combination of radiation sickness, hypothermia, hunger and fatigue. It is not a very pleasant scene. And, please, don't forget to shiver.'

Dutifully, the refugees shut out the sun and the faint hum of weekend traffic and shamble forwards in their jumble-sale shoes, their worn and shabby coats, their thickest blankets. They clutch their valuables in supermarket bags or drag them in makeshift trailers: a prized can of processed peas, an extra pair of gloves, the last cigarettes. An unemployed Sheffield toolmaker, who has never 'pretended in public' before, tumbles almost weightlessly into a damp hollow and 'dies'. A teenage girl sinks to her knees every few yards and then rises as if she is lifting some ungainly weight. A schoolteacher, bowed by a dying child on his shoulders, coughs and wheezes.

Every face declares resignation or despair, apathy or disorientation. It is uncanny and a little depressing how naturally the volunteers have taken to their task. They need little drilling on the privations of post-holocaust Britain.

'They know they can't exaggerate,' says Barry Hines, the local writer who has scripted *Threads*. He has been warmed and delighted by the professionalism of the amateurs: 'We held a meeting for volunteers in the ballroom of Sheffield City Hall. We expected a few dozen, but 1,100 people showed up. They have acted marvellously. I have been both touched and depressed whenever I've watched the filming. I've felt that shiver up my spine, tears in my eyes.'

But Hines has not set out to write ➤ 18



17 ← an emotional film. 'It was my duty to be as even-handed and as objective as possible,' he says. 'This film must be as accurate as any film can be. People will not have seen a film which is as factual as this. A lot of people saw *The Day After* but they could disassociate from it because it portrayed an American experience. *The War Game* was good – but it is out of date now.'

It is difficult, in fact, to be up to date. Hines was continually having to revise his script as new information came to light. On this February day of filming at Curbar, a report has been released by the World Health Organisation. Its panel of experts, including scientists from London, Boston and Moscow, agrees that a one-megaton bomb dropped on London would kill 1.8 million people outright and, in the event of an all-out war (of approximately 10,000 megatons), half the world's population, more than 2.2 billion people, would be immediate victims'.

And – despite the cheery assertion of one St John Ambulance Brigade volunteer on duty at the filming that 'I would have an important medical role after a war' – most experts predict that no health service in the world could hope to function. And within days yet another report – this time from British farmers – describes agriculture after the bomb: the land 'devastated by tidal waves', grain supplies 'decimated by looters', weeds and insects (the best survivors, our natural heirs) re-possessing the 'countryside'.

'There would be some survivors, of course,' says Hines, carefully avoiding the exaggerated and unscientific prognoses which, he feels, have marred both sides of the nuclear debate (and which *Threads* hopes to balance.) 'But many would have hideous, untreated injuries, and

then there would be widespread radiation sickness and leukaemia. There could be a sort of Third World-cum-medieval peasant agriculture. There would be barter, a relearning of old manual skills, a new language among kids because there wouldn't be the standardising influences of schools, newspapers and television. And I can't imagine loving parents. As soon as kids were big enough, they would have to work and fend for themselves. The generation which would follow ours would be brutal, stunted both physically, emotionally...'

'And mentally...' adds Mick Jackson. While making his earlier *Q.E.D.* documentary, *A Guide to Armageddon*, he unearthed a plethora of scientific data which had not been generally available, not because it was secret but simply because it had been buried in learned journals. It mostly concerned the psychological impact of nuclear war: 'There has been a rather optimistic belief maintained by officials in Europe and America that after the first few weeks survivors are going to come out of their shelters, gung-ho like the Seven Dwarfs with picks over their shoulders, and set off to work on the reconstruction of Britain.'

'But even after the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when the Allies poured in money to rebuild the cities, there was no psychological improvement for the survivors. So you can imagine what it would be like in a global nuclear war when there would be no outside forces to provide assistance. We must expect profound and prolonged psychological damage.'

Even the 'chosen few' (those officials and top brass already named and designated to govern Britain in the PH years from their regional



Ruth  
(Karen Meagher,  
left), the central  
character in  
*Threads*, joins  
an angry mob  
at the gates  
of a locked  
food depot



bunkers) cannot expect to remain psychologically intact – particularly if they have been stationed in the shelter under one city hall which has its only toilet situated on ground level! Both Jackson and Hines spent a week at the Home Office training centre for 'official survivors' at Easingwold in Yorkshire.

'We sat in on one of their courses,' says Barry Hines. 'They set the participants up in control rooms and let them handle the survivors. We had our eyes opened on how disorganised it would all be. And we thought that the whole approach of these courses was over-optimistic. But it has to be, doesn't it? Breakfast, lunch and dinner – and every day a clean shirt. And plenty of plucky gallows humour, too, just like in the First World War.' One man, remembers Hines, was a smoker and his colleagues delighted in pulling his leg: 'Stub it out, old son. Smoking's bad for you. You'll never make old bones.'

But Hines sensed a barely suppressed disquiet at Easingwold – the participants understood that they were merely simulating war. But, in a real war, would they leave their wives and children for the limited safety of the bunkers? Would their teasing good humour survive the claustrophobic months of incarceration? Would they be fit to rule? 'Some just shrugged the problems off and said, "It'll never happen",' says Hines. 'Others – and this is the most common response – said, "I don't want to know about it. When it happens, let me be pissed and right underneath the very first bomb." But as the course progressed they became more thoughtful. Nobody came out of that week unchanged.'

And none of the cast and 'extras', too, came out of filming unchanged. They had come as close, perhaps, as anybody in Britain to 'experiencing' a Third World War. Their faces caked with 'radiation burns' which have set thick and cold like the skin of custard, they are now filming a few miles to the east of Curbar Edge, at the appropriately named Spitewinter Farm. Its fields are newly rigged by 'props' with the antler trees of a defoliated forest. It is PH2 and time for the first, precarious harvest.

The fittest volunteers drag away the bales like working horses, while the weakest and sickest glean every scattered seed. A quarter of a mile away in the valley, the huntsmen are out with their hounds and their 'pink' livery. 'I see the toffs are still having a good time after the holocaust,' jokes one of the extras.

Further in the distance, over what the city council has designated 'Nuclear Free Sheffield', the thin, soundless vapour trail of a Finningley jet decorates the sky. ●

# BBC 2

9.30 pm

**Threads**

The story of a nuclear attack by BARRY HINES  
starring  
**Karen Meagher**  
as Ruth Beckett,  
and Reece Dinsdale  
as Jimmy Kemp  
It's a normal Thursday in Sheffield. Ruth and her boyfriend, Jimmy, are in the pub. The Middle East crisis is just an item on the evening news - 3,000 miles away. This drama, based on available facts, tells the story of a nuclear strike on Britain, seen through the eyes of two Sheffield families - the Kemps and the Becketts - and their designated wartime Controller, the city's peacetime Chief Executive, Clive Sutton. It traces the events of the four weeks that lead up to a nuclear war, and the decade that follows. What will life be like for the survivors? In the days, months and years to come can the fabric of society

hold together: how strong are the threads?

Mrs Beckett ..... JUNE BROUGHTON  
Mr Beckett ..... HENRY MOXON  
Granny Beckett ... SYLVIA STOKER  
Mr Kemp ..... DAVID BRERIER  
Mrs Kemp ..... RITA MAY  
Michael Kemp .... NICHOLAS LANE  
Alison Kemp ..... JANE HAZLEGROVE  
Bob ..... ASHLEY BARKER  
Jane ..... VICTORIA O'KEEFE  
Clive Sutton..... HARRY BEETY  
Marjorie Sutton....RUTH HOLDEN  
Chief Supt Hirst

MICHAEL O'HAGAN

Medical officer ..... PHIL ROSE  
Information officer

STEVE HALLIWELL

Transport officer

PETER FAULKNER

Food officer ..... ANTHONY COLLIN

Accommodation officer

BRIAN GRELLIS

Scientific adviser .... MICHAEL ELY

Manpower officer

SHARON BAYLIS

Works officer..... DAVID STUTT

Mr Stothard ..... PHIL ASHKHAM

Mrs Stothard ..... ANNA SEYMOUR

Carol Stothard..... FIONA ROOK

Peace speaker .... MAGGIE HOLMES

Trade unionist ..... MIKE KAY

Street trader ..... JOHN LIVESLEY

Mr Langley ..... JOE HOLMES

Mr Haslam..... JOE BELCHER

Woman in supermarket

CHRISTINE BUCKLEY

Boy in supermarket

DAVID MAJOR

Old man in graveyard

NAT JACKLEY

Woman in hospital

GRETA DUNN

Policemen

TED BEYER, DEAN WILLIAMSON

Soldiers

GRAHAM HILL, NIGEL COLLINS

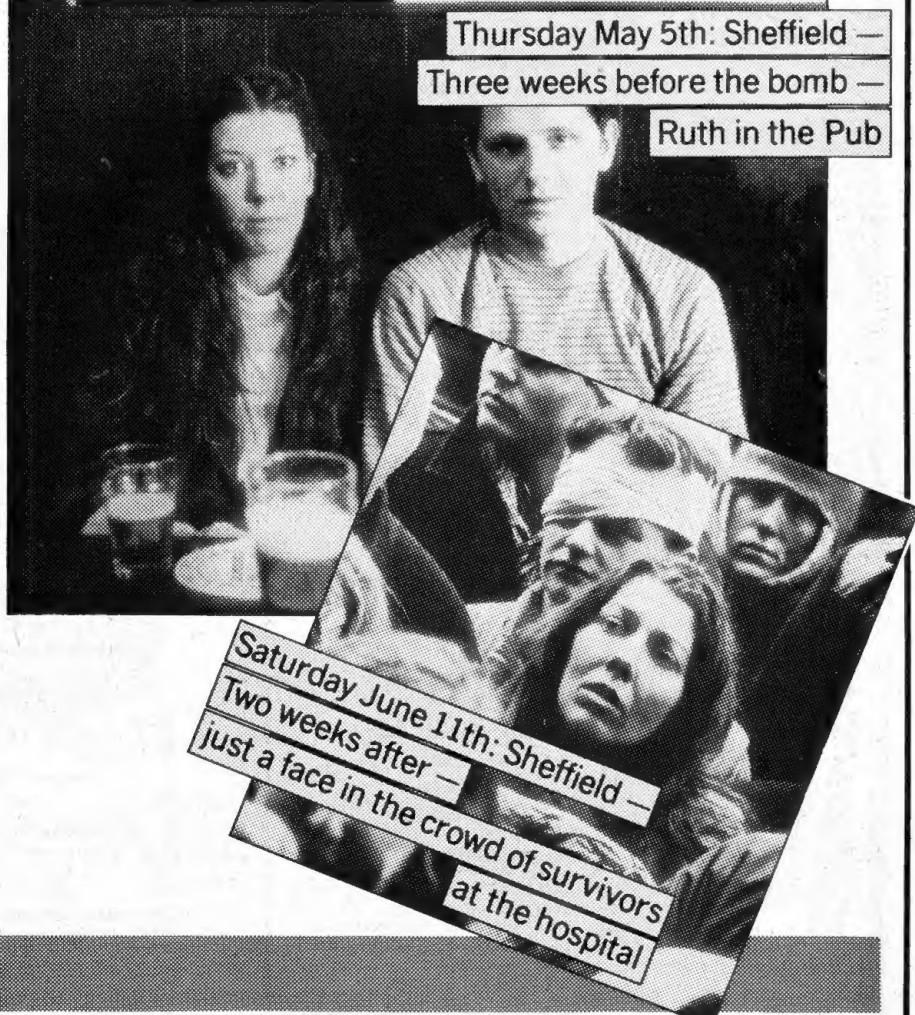
Officers ..... RICHARD ALBRECHT

ANDY FENN-RODGERS

Thursday May 5th: Sheffield —

Three weeks before the bomb —

Ruth in the Pub



A crisis on the TV news - what does it mean for Ruth and Jimmy? The end of the world?  
BBC2, 9.30 pm Threads

**Looters**

JERRY READY, DENNIS CONLON

**Newscasters**

LESLEY JUDD, COLIN WARD-Lewis

**Narration by Paul Vaughan**

Designer CHRIS ROBILLARD

Photography ANDREW DUNN

Film editor JIM LATHAM

Associate producer PETER WOLFES

Executive producers

GRAHAM MASSEY, JOHN PURDIE

Produced and directed by

MIKE JACKSON

(On The 8th Day: a Natural World Special, Tomorrow 9.30 pm)

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**On the 8th Day  
Monday BBC2**

*Threads depicts scenes of the 'nuclear winter' that leading scientists believe could envelop the world eight days after a nuclear war. Monday's documentary looks at the research and what would happen to our planet. Nigel Hawkes reports*

# The big chill

THE PROSPECT of nuclear war has always been a subject too vast and horrible for easy contemplation. Hundreds of millions dead, cities obliterated, whole societies silenced at the flick of a switch: in an unbelieveable age it has become our vision of hell. But if a programme to be broadcast this week is right, we may not know the half of it.

Scientists on both sides of the Iron Curtain now believe that a nuclear war could mean, quite literally, the end of our world. After such a war the world could be plunged into a long and freezing twilight which would kill plants and animals and threaten mankind with starvation right around the world. This terrifying scenario, christened the 'nuclear winter', is the subject of **On the 8th Day**, a documentary produced by Michael Andrews.

The scientists who discovered the possibility of the nuclear winter stumbled on to it almost by accident. Of course, nobody had ever claimed that a nuclear exchange, however small, would be a picnic. But it had been thought that although millions would die, millions more would survive. The whole concept of civil defence is based on this belief. And in the southern hemisphere, relatively isolated from the warring north, life might even be able to continue without much evidence of change. The nuclear winter shatters these beliefs.

The first hints came from space research. Instruments carried on to the surface of Mars by the Mariner spacecraft recorded a sudden drop in surface temperatures coinciding with dust storms. At the same time, scientists studying the mysterious disappearance of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago concluded that they had died after the Earth collided with a comet or meteorite, raising a huge cloud of dust which obliterated the sun. Yet another group pointed out that a nuclear war would ignite huge fires, setting cities and forests alight and filling the atmosphere with smoke.

The next step was to build computer models of the atmosphere to test the injection of huge quantities of smoke and dust. The results were hair-raising. The northern

hemisphere would be plunged into darkness: at midday it would be no brighter than a moonlit night. Temperatures would fall by up to 40°C, and remain below average for months. The effects would be worst in the northern hemisphere, but the south would not be spared.

Such dramatic changes in the climate would destroy many species of plant and animal, particularly in the Tropics, where species are equipped to handle only small temperature variations. Mankind would lose at least one harvest, and perhaps more. The horrors of sudden death in war would be succeeded by the agonies of hunger and starvation. All in all, not a very cheerful picture.

Not all scientists yet accept it. One of the doubters is Sir Ronald

Mason, a former director of the Meteorological Office, who dismisses it all as trivial, back-of-the-envelope stuff. Others question whether nuclear weapons will produce fire storms, or, if they do, whether the smoke will go high enough into the atmosphere to produce the months of nuclear winter.

But Sir Frederick Warner, a distinguished British chemical engineer, is sufficiently concerned to be organising a series of scientific projects to test the idea, under the auspices of the International Scientific Committee on the Problems of the Environment. 'At first sight, it looks like a serious problem,' he says. 'But we need to know a lot more about it and I think that there's a lot more work to be done.'

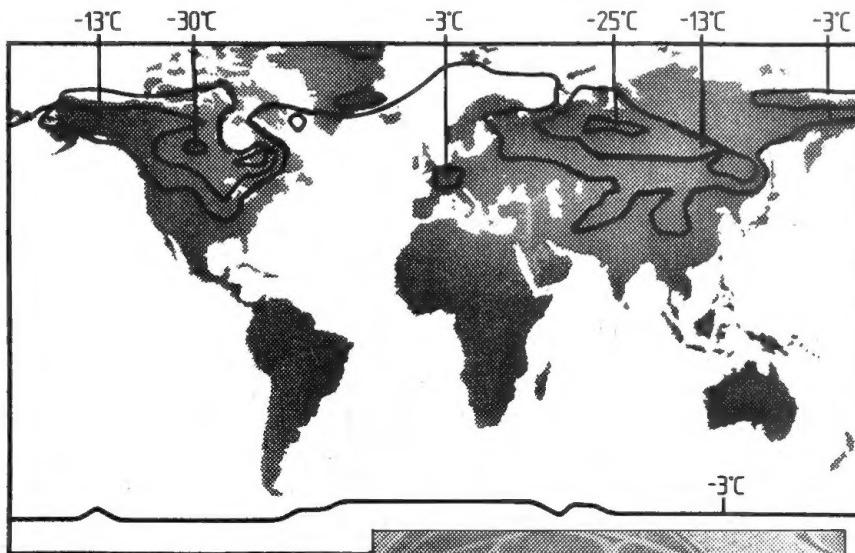
The American Administration seems to agree, as it has committed £40 million for research on the subject - a prodigious sum for an academic discipline like atmospheric modelling. The results will be important not because they will make nuclear war more unthinkable than ever - for rational men have never thought of waging nuclear war anyway - but for their implications should deterrence fail, and for the extra pressure they may exert (especially in non-combatant countries) to bring the nuclear arms race under control. ●

*Paul R. Ehrlich and Carl Sagan, who feature in Monday's programme, are co-authors, with Donald Kennedy and Walter Orr Roberts, of The Cold and the Dark, published by Sidgwick & Jackson, £8.95.*



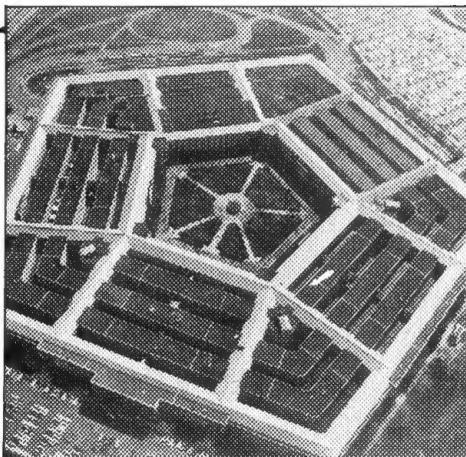
**The bleak nuclear mid-winter: mankind would struggle to survive in a freezing twilight world**

Computer prediction of sub-freezing world temperatures in midsummer, on the eighth day after a nuclear conflict.



I expect ongoing studies to conclude that most scenarios for nuclear war – even low level scenarios – would result in 'nuclear winter'.

RICHARD WAGNER,  
Assistant to the Secretary of Defense,  
Atomic Energy USA, stated on  
11 July 1984



### 9.30 On the 8th Day

*A Natural World* special  
Most people – and most governments – believe that following a nuclear war, no matter how terrible the effects of blast, fire and radiation might be, there would be unaffected areas from which civilisation might be rebuilt. But since 1982, scientific evidence has been accumulating that smoke and dust from a nuclear conflict could plunge the northern hemisphere into twilight for weeks, and cause temperatures to drop as much as 40° centigrade, with catastrophic effect on plants and animals. This programme tells the story of accidental discovery and spare-time research in America, Russia and Britain, which suggests that for 30 years we have had the capacity to cause a 'nuclear winter'. Written and produced by MICHAEL ANDREWS Film editor ANDREW NAYLOR Series editor PETER JONES BBC Bristol

# LETTERS

Write to: Letters Editor, Radio Times, 35 Marylebone High Street, London W1M 4AA

## 'Threads': who'd want to survive the catastrophe?

WORDS CAN'T EXPRESS my admiration for the BBCtv presentation of *Threads* (23 September BBC2). My two teenage daughters and I sat riveted from the start, seized by Barry Hines's absolutely true-to-life script and the superb acting of all the cast under Mick Jackson's direction.

Even allowing for the fact that a British background is more familiar (and therefore more terrifying) than an American one, I thought *Threads* vastly superior to *The Day After* (ITV), though it was interesting to note the parallels between the two: the message was the same - that if a nuclear holocaust is inevitable, there is no future for mankind, and no place to hide. One could only pray to be obliterated at once rather than linger on for a while as a so-called survivor, a prey to disease, famine and total degradation of body, mind and spirit.

The most telling part of the film for me was Ruth wandering among the wreckage, corpses and chaos, with solitary lost voices calling through the gloom and wild-eyed remnants of humanity appearing before her like sequences in a nightmare. An inferno of suffering was amazingly presented to us with few concessions to prudery, and tears came to my eyes at the thought of my daughters in Ruth's situation.

So many vital points were made, and driven home. Nuclear fall-out shelters would only be a very temporary refuge

enough we saw society before and after, allowing us to compare and contrast our cushioned civilised existence with the gory horrors and nightmares of a post-bomb future. In its depiction of the physical conditions, scientifically researched, I cannot question its accuracy; but, psychologically, would the typical human react in such an uncompromisingly selfish, callous manner, even in the face of a desperate, competitive struggle for survival?

Yes, I believe rioting, looting and violence would be as inevitable as the drama showed. But not once were we given a view of humans mitigating their nightmare (if only slightly) by giving mutual help, at least by communicating their own pain and hence sympathy with fellow sufferers... It was as if the bombs completely destroyed man's ability to love - a premise confirmed by Ruth's daughter's dispassionate reaction to her mother's death. Was this aspect of the drama, too, scientifically researched? Are we to understand that we should have so little faith in mankind? If so, then this drama was truly horrific.

*Sophia M. Draper*

Aberdeen

### Show it to our leaders

Congratulations to all concerned with the production of *Threads*. This vision of our possible future was more chilling than any science fiction, and completely believable when supported by so much scientific fact.

The programme should be compulsory viewing for all those in positions of power, both here and around the world. I only wish that the BBC could mount a similarly authentic production in the Soviet Union. Certainly Messrs Reagan and Chernenko should be made to watch it as a prelude to their proposed arms reduction talks.

*Rosalind Blake*

Halesworth, Suffolk

### Nineteen years late

*Threads* contained nothing that was not implicitly covered in Peter Watkins's *The War Game*. Had the BBC had the courage to screen this when it was first made, in an era when such a prestigious broadcast would have had a far greater impact, the present generation might have already cast their votes in favour of nuclear disarmament.

*David Holloway*

Leighton, Powys

### Lack of preparation

... The Northern realism of Barry Hines combined with a documentary approach to facts gave a balanced view of both personal and national tragedy with a gruesome realism, disturbing to watch...

I am not a supporter of CND; I believe

nuclear weapons to be an unfortunate necessity of today's society. The continuation of the story after the attack allowed the deficiency of aid to the survivors to be shown as yet another testimony to the lack of preparation for such circumstances. Is it too much to hope that *Threads* will be a lesson, not just to the television audience (the eventual sufferers of nuclear catastrophe) but to those who as protagonists are responsible for the outcome of such a conflict?

(Ms) Leigh Chambers

Doncaster, South Yorkshire

### Unnecessary

I would dearly love to know what the producers of *Threads* and *On the 8th Day* (24 September BBC2) hope to achieve, other than giving people unwanted nightmares and spreading gloom and despondency? Ordinary people are in no position to do anything about nuclear weapons - we are at the mercy of the madmen who have their fingers on the button. Programmes like this only serve to terrify people, induce depression, and spread an attitude of apathetic acceptance.

I did not watch either programme; the publicity about them was enough to convince me they were better left unseen, and I do not need to be made 'aware' of what life would be like after a nuclear attack. I know enough about the subject to know that if I was unlucky enough to survive the first strike, I would have to commit suicide to avoid the horrors that would follow...

This endless nuclear bombardment of the suggestible viewing public is both dangerous and irresponsible. It is a universal truth that what we visualise and concentrate on will eventually come to pass. By continually feeding them images of nuclear attacks people will come to believe that this is inevitable...

*Michael L. Walton*

New Pitsligo, Aberdeenshire

### Tell it to the Russians!

Barry Hines certainly confirmed through his drama-documentary *Threads* the terrible horror which we all share about nuclear war. But if his intention was to make other people as neurotic about nuclear disarmament as he and a few BBC cranks seem to be, then he has not succeeded. Try selling the film to Soviet television, Mr Hines!

*K. J. Worrall*

Wistaston, Cheshire

MICK JACKSON, Producer and director, 'Threads', replies:

*Sophia Draper's letter raises some important points. Sadly, our own intuition about how people would, or should, behave after a nuclear war is an inadequate guide to the real thing. In *Threads* Barry Hines and I drew on a large number of scientific studies on the way people actually did behave after Hiroshima and on how long-lasting and destructive the social impact even of peacetime disasters like floods and hurricanes has been on communities that have suffered them.*

*At the time of going to press I understand that Soviet television is viewing a copy of the film in Moscow but has not yet decided whether or not it will transmit it in the Soviet Union. Like Rosalind Blake and Mr Worrall I hope it does. Our intention in making *Threads* was to step aside from the politics and - I hope convincingly - show the actual effects on either side should our best endeavours to prevent nuclear war fail. Any compassion which viewers feel will not, I am sure, have been limited to the citizens of Sheffield but will have been extended to any human being who suffered those appalling consequences - a basic human response which must surely dwarf any differences in ideology.*

before panic, food shortage, inadequate sanitation and the baser side of human nature took over - and what happens when the occupants come out into the tainted air?... I sadly agree that in times of catastrophe the worst side of our nature is more likely to prevail over the better...

(Mrs) Margaret Holt  
Urmston, Manchester

### Compassion destroyed

I was staggered at the conclusions *Threads* apparently came to. This drama, about the aftermath of a nuclear attack, we were told, followed the theme of the break-up of the 'threads' of society. Sure



### How 'limited'?

Having watched *The Newsnight Nuclear Debate* (24 September BBC2) I found my worst fears realised. 'Limited' nuclear war was made to sound almost safe! Just a dozen or so warheads tossed about, that's all, and then perhaps there would be no 'nuclear winter' after all, no dramatic changes in climate, no twilight at noon. Before we all breathe a sigh of relief let us ask a question. Supposing for a moment that limited nuclear war is a real possibility - limited to what and more importantly, to whom? It is unlikely that the Soviets and Americans will limit nuclear war to each other. They will limit it to the Middle East and Europe. This will include Britain: this means us. These dozen NATO warheads met by a dozen Soviet missiles will mean European civilian casualties on an unprecedented scale, even if they are directed purely at military targets. A limited nuclear war would make the Second World War look like a picnic at the seaside. A limited nuclear war means millions dead and dying from its effects and whether the sun is blotted out for six weeks or six months or for ever means nothing to these people...

*Helen Mosse*

Westhide, Herefordshire

### Unpleasant coverage

Please couldn't we always have something pleasant or cheerful on the RADIO TIMES cover? After all, it stays around the sitting-room for a week, and one doesn't want a week's reminder of ugly things.

I've just had to paste over your *Threads* cover with Terry Wogan, for want of anything better.

(Mrs) Grace Harland  
Reigate, Surrey

# LETTERS

Write to: Letters Editor, Radio Times, 35 Marylebone High Street, London W1M 4AA

## 'Threads': more reaction

**THE FILM** *Threads* (23 September BBC2), which depicted the scenario leading up to the aftermath of nuclear war, including the destruction of Sheffield, raised important issues involving civil defence and the behaviour of the population under war conditions.

The film made it clear that the Chief Executive of Sheffield District Council and his Chief Officers who had to man the wartime headquarters were either untrained or had received little training in civil defence organisation. However, the film did not state that Sheffield is a nuclear free zone and that plans had not been updated since 1981. It was this lack of training and pre-planning which came over so vividly in the film. Nor was there any reference in the film to any of the many excellent voluntary organisations who undertake training to assist in such situations...

As Dr Philip Steadman said in *The Newsnight Nuclear Debate* (24 September BBC2), it would be immoral to do nothing to help survivors, or that nothing could be done. But it should be asked, 'Are we as a nation doing enough?'

H. A. Tinsley

(Chairman, Association of Civil Defence and Emergency Planning Officers)  
West Bridgford, Nottinghamshire

### Lack of clear thinking

In *The Newsnight Nuclear Debate* it seemed to me that the only person who expressed thoughtful argument was Dr Prins. Yet all the people taking part were in jobs where clear thinking and intelligence must play a significant part in the work they do.

From the programme seen on television and the facts that have been put forward from many sources, it seems very clear that most of the weapons we have accumulated, those in Russia and America and elsewhere, serve no purpose. Yet members on the panel talked glibly about dozens and hundreds of weapons being 'safe' as a first strike. Safe for whom? Everyone has seen the effects on Japan of a bomb which had only a fraction of the power of modern nuclear missiles.

Everyone on the panel agreed that governments must not allow a situation to occur where a nuclear exchange is triggered off. How strange, then, that the majority were not prepared to admit that so many weapons were a waste of money and a useless deterrent...

Scientists all over the world, including Russians, acknowledge the uselessness of all these weapons; the World Medical Council, and our own, acknowledge the futility of thinking adequate medical help can be given if nuclear weapons are used. But in spite of this the civil defence speaker in the debate put forward the suggestion that those communities which want nothing to do with preparing for a nuclear attack do a disservice to their community...

The absence of a Home Office official and Michael Heseltine from the debate made it clear to me that any discussion on these matters is a waste of their time.

They have their point of view, they think they're right and they're not even going to listen to what other people have to say. I can't blame them if they're tired of being questioned about their motives.

Stella Lindup

Bonsall, Derbyshire

### Unlikely scenario

...More than once in the debate George Walden commented that the way the nuclear exchange was triggered in the film *Threads* was not credible to him. This seems to imply that because he found this particular scenario for the triggering of a nuclear exchange unconvincing he has confidence that there will never be a triggering of such a nuclear exchange however long the world lives in the shadow of over-armed deterrence.

To say, as he did, that the nuclear winter undermines the case for establishing nuclear free zones is unjustifiably to impugn the responsible civic motives of local authorities who adopt an NFZ policy, and to misunderstand or misrepresent the philosophy underlying NFZ policy...

Mike Bell

Heptonstall, West Yorkshire

MICK JACKSON, Producer and director, 'Threads', replies:

Despite George Walden's remarks, some analysts see a future East-West confrontation over Iran as a distinct possibility if that country ever destabilises.

### Stronger than fiction

Why do people like Edwina Currie persist in deluding themselves (and attempting to delude others) into thinking that because something is fictional it is also invalid. True, she acknowledged in *Did You See..?* (30 September BBC2) that she found the BBC holocaust drama *Threads* profoundly moving, but in an attempt to reassure anyone who may have doubts about the Conservative policy of nuclear deterrence she dismissed the drama as fiction. I hope there were no viewers weak-minded enough to be misled by this. Of course it was fiction, simply by virtue of its never having happened, but Mrs Currie's political ploy was to blur the distinction between pure fiction-by-definition and implausible science-fiction-fantasy. It may be all right to say to a child 'Don't worry dear, the Daleks aren't real,' but it's quite fatuous to say 'Don't worry about *Threads*; it'll never happen so long as we of the Conservative government re-

tain Cruise and Trident and Polaris and...'

Stephen Dunstone

Harlow, Essex

### Unfair to Tory MPs

May I use your columns to express my alarm at the distortion of the truth contained in the play *Did You See..?* (30 September BBC2). While it is obviously within the boundaries of dramatic licence to have an actress play the part of a Conservative Member of Parliament, it is clear that to use that actress as the mouthpiece of ill-argued and unconvincing banalities can neither do justice to the viewpoint and policies of the current government nor observe the requirements of balance imposed by the BBC's Charter.

Harry Gilonis

London SW19

### Authority on what?

In his article on the nuclear winter (RADIO TIMES 22-28 September) Nigel Hawkes names, as a leading sceptic, Sir Ronald Mason, 'a former director of the Meteorological Office'.

The meteorologist is Sir John Mason. Sir Ronald has no particular expertise in this field, but was until last year Chief Scientific Adviser in the Ministry of Defence. Which Mason is the sceptic?

It matters, because if it was indeed Sir Ronald, then to present him as a meteorologist gives undue weight to his dismissive comment. Whatever else it is, the nuclear winter theory is clearly not 'trivial, back-of-the-envelope stuff' - though no doubt the Ministry of Defence, like the animals in Roger Woddis's excellent poem in the same issue of RADIO TIMES, would like us to believe that it is.

(Prof) R. P. C. Mutter

Chailey, East Sussex

The reference was to Sir John Mason, not Sir Ronald, and we very much regret any confusion or embarrassment caused by our error. - LETTERS EDITOR



## Cover-up continues

The Letters pages so often contain useful advice. My thanks to Mrs Grace Harland (RADIO TIMES 13-19 October): I shall keep the *Threads* cover, ready to paste over the next one featuring Terry Wogan.

*John Hodgkinson*

Rydal, Cumbria